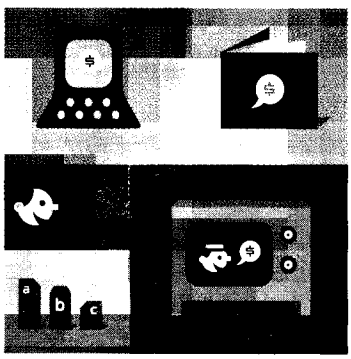
# Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

*Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet*

# Get the news you need

While reading Harold Coyle's novel *Against All Enemies* the other night, I came across a line that struck me as brilliant: "The curse of the information age is information." It's true, the past few years have seen a remarkable spike in the volume of data that has been published and available. A recent study from the University of California, Berkeley indicates there will be more data created in the next two years than have been created in the previous 40,000 years. The problem is that many of us are drowning in all this information because we can't figure out how to make it useful, timely, relevant and accessible.



While we've slowly been mastering the use of search engines to locate information on specific topics, what about the new bits of data that could be relevant to us if only we knew they existed? That's where automated news-clipping services come in. These tools let you specify words and phrases that you want to track, and when they appear in newspapers, magazines or on the Web, you'll be notified either via e-mail or through a custom Web page. This can be an extremely powerful method of keeping on top of news stories concerning particular companies, executives, industry issues or trends.

One of the best such services is free, relatively new and comes from Google, one of the most innovative search engines on the Internet. Simply enter the word or phrase you want to track (which could be a corporate name or subject area), enter your e-mail address and you're set to receive regular messages pointing to recent news articles of relevance. (Of course, if you find that the search results aren't precise enough, you should spend some time studying the advanced search syntax used within Google and make that part of the search topic you are tracking.) Yahoo offers a similar service called, not surprisingly, Yahoo News Alerts.

If this service wets your whistle, try out the 14-day trial of Nexcerpt. Its innovative news-tracking feature allows you to build your daily clipped stories into a newsletter that is distributed via e-mail. Stories are collected for you throughout the day in one of several different categories. You can preview these stories at any time (say, first thing in the morning) and delete any that aren't of interest. Then, at a set time each day (say, noon) your newsletter is "built" and distributed to everyone on your e-mail list, with excerpts and links to that day's news stories. This is an excellent way to keep your team informed of important issues related to a project or for a group working on the audit of a particular client. A similar innovative service can be found at Net2One.com. Both services operate on a monthly fee-for-service basis.

These sites barely scratch the surface; there are other news-clipping services available for a fee from Factiva (a joint venture between Dow Jones and Reuters), Infomart (CanWest Global) and LexisNexis. In addition, there are many professional clipping companies that make their services available on the Internet — they'll have their experts set up and monitor your clipping topics, greatly increasing the relevance of what is sent to you.

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